CANADA FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION

John R. Evans Leaders Fund

Guidelines for reviewers – Partnership streams

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INNOVATION
Canada Foundation for Innovation
Fondation canadienne pour l'innovation

Introduction

These instructions are intended for reviewers who are responsible for reviewing a proposal submitted to the John R. Evans Leaders Fund (JELF) in conjunction with one of our partners, the Canada Research Chairs (CRC), the Canada Excellence Research Chairs (CERC), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). These partnerships reduce the burden on applicants and reviewers.

Note: Reviewers reviewing an unaffiliated JELF proposal should consult the *Guidelines for reviewers – Unaffiliated stream*.

Mandate of the Canada Foundation for Innovation

Created by the Government of Canada in 1997, the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) strives to build our nation's capacity to undertake world-class research and technology development to benefit Canadians. Thanks to CFI investment in state-of-the-art facilities and equipment, universities, colleges, research hospitals and non-profit research institutions are attracting and retaining the world's top talent, training the next generation of researchers, supporting private-sector innovation and creating high-quality jobs that strengthen Canada's position in today's knowledge economy. Read more at Innovation.ca

Program description

At a time of intense international competition, the John R. Evans Leaders Fund (JELF) is a critical strategic investment tool designed to help institutions attract and retain the very best of today's and tomorrow's researchers. The fund's name pays tribute to the outstanding contributions of John R. Evans, the first Chair of the CFI's Board of Directors.

The JELF enables a select number of an institution's excellent researchers to undertake innovative research by providing them with the foundational research infrastructure required to be or to become leaders in their field. In turn, this enables institutions to remain internationally competitive in areas of research and technology development that are aligned with their strategic priorities.

Canadian universities recognized as eligible by the CFI receive an allocation of CFI funds commensurate with funding received from the three federal research funding agencies (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) over the last three years.

Eligible infrastructure projects

Eligible projects can involve:

- The acquisition or development of research infrastructure including workhorses to increase research capacity and enable innovative research activities, (high usage equipment that routinely and dependably perform over a long period of time), and the upgrading or replacement of aging infrastructure;
- Research equipment that, while in and of itself is basic, will enable innovative research or technology development activities;
- The construction of a new building or the development of new space in an existing building (e.g. new floors, reconfiguration of existing space) only when new space is essential to house and use the eligible infrastructure requested in the proposal or when additional space to house and use other eligible infrastructure (i.e. not part of the current proposal) that is essential for the use of the requested infrastructure.

The CFI funds up to 40 percent of a project's eligible infrastructure costs. Institutions must secure the remaining 60 percent of the required funding, typically from provincial governments and other public, private and non-profit organizations.

The CFI also contributes to the operation and maintenance (O&M) costs of funded projects through its Infrastructure Operating Fund. The support allocated is equivalent to 30 percent of the CFI contribution to the capital costs of the funded project. These O&M funds do not need matching funding.

Merit-review process

The merit-review process is designed to assess whether proposals meet the JELF criteria (see below) and is tailored to the nature and complexity of the proposals. The partner organization manages the expert evaluation process. Should a proposal receive divergent reviews, have a proposed research plan that spans diverse disciplines or is otherwise complex, the CFI may:

- Request a teleconference with reviewers of the proposal;
- Seek the input of an additional reviewer; and/or,
- Seek the input of the JELF Advisory Committee.

The number of criteria depends on the partner organization and the amount requested from the CFI in the proposal.

JELF-CRC/CERC programs

Total CFI request ($)	Assessment criteria
Less than or equal to $75,000	Infrastructure
More than $75,000 to $800,000	Infrastructure and Benefits to Canadians

JELF-NSERC and JELF-SSHRC programs

Total CFI request ($)	Assessment criterion
Less than or equal to $800,000	Infrastructure

We ask applicants to address a number of aspects under each criterion standard in their proposal. Failure to address all of the aspects that apply to the proposal within each criterion should be treated as a weakness and assessed as such.

As a reviewer, you must rate the degree to which the proposal meets each criterion standard using an assessment scale (see below). Please substantiate the ratings by explaining the strengths and weaknesses you perceive for each of the assessment criteria in the proposal.

The cost estimates should also form part of your assessment under the "infrastructure" section of the report. In the budget evaluation, identify any items not adequately justified in view of the planned research activities.

It is incumbent upon the applicant to demonstrate in the proposal how the project satisfies each criterion, so the proposal should be the only source of information for your review.

Documents and review material

The partner organization provides the documents and review materials needed to conduct the review. When you are asked to complete a written report for a single proposal, an anonymized copy of your report will be shared with the applicant institution. To ensure that anonymity is preserved, we kindly ask that you refrain from writing any comments in your report that could reveal your identity.

When you are invited to participate in a review committee meeting, you will be asked to submit preliminary reports on CAMS prior to the meeting. These reports help to identify areas of focus for the discussion during the meeting and help inform the Expert Committee report. They are not shared with the applicant institutions.

During the meeting, reviewers will be called upon to present their preliminary assessments. A general discussion will ensue, focusing on the criteria where there are significant discrepancies among the reviewers' assessments. Ultimately, for each criterion, the committee must reach a consensus on:

- The degree to which the proposal satisfies the criterion standard;
- An appropriate rating for each assessment criterion;
- The strengths and weaknesses of the proposal for each assessment criterion; and,
- A funding recommendation.

After the meeting, the CFI will write a report that will be shared with the applicant institution. The names of members appear on the committee reports.

Assessment scale

EX Significantly exceeds the criterion

SA Satisfies the criterion

SW Satisfies the criterion with only a few minor weaknesses

PS Partially satisfies the criterion with some significant weaknesses

NS Does not satisfy the criterion due to major weaknesses

Assessment criteria

INFRASTRUCTURE

The infrastructure is necessary and appropriate to conduct the research or technology development activities.

- Describe each item and justify its need to conduct the proposed activities. For construction or renovation, provide a description of the space including its location, size and nature. Use the item number, quantity, cost and location found in the "Cost of individual items" table. Provide a cost breakdown for any grouping of items.
- Explain why existing infrastructure within the institution and the region cannot be used to conduct the proposed activities.

Note: For construction or renovation, a detailed cost breakdown, timeline and floor plans must be provided in a separate document as part of the finance module.

BENEFITS TO CANADIANS

The research or technology development results will be transferred through appropriate pathways to potential end users and are likely to generate social, health, environmental and/or economic benefits to Canadians, including better training and improved skills for highly qualified personnel.[1]

- Briefly describe potential socioeconomic benefits, including better training and improved skills for highly qualified personnel.
- Delineate the knowledge mobilization plan and/or technology transfer pathways, including partnerships with end users.

[1] Highly qualified personnel include technicians, research associates, undergraduate students, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

Decision making

Funding decisions

The partner organization will make final funding decisions on the research component while the CFI Board of Directors will make decisions on the infrastructure component, at one of its triennial meetings. The proposal must meet the requirements of both the partner organization and the CFI to receive CFI funding. The CFI Board of Directors' approval of the positive funding recommendation for the CFI infrastructure request is conditional upon a positive funding decision for the partner organization component.

The CFI will then inform institutions by email of the decisions made on the CFI components. The partner organization will share the reviewers' comments with institutions. When the CFI seeks the input of additional expert reviewers or the JELF Advisory Committee, it will share these additional comments with the institutions directly.

CFI oversight of merit-review process

Role of CFI staff

CFI staff guide expert reviewers and committee members through the merit-review process to ensure its integrity. This involves providing instructions on the CFI review process, policies and procedures, and ensuring consistency in the proposal evaluations. They are also responsible for drafting the committee reports and confirming their accuracy in consultation with the committee.

Collaboration with provinces and territories

To coordinate the review process and avoid duplication of review efforts, review materials are shared with provinces and territories in accordance with agreements between the CFI and provincial and territorial funding authorities, as permissible pursuant to the Privacy Act.